

Learning Outcomes

- To note the benefits of planting trees
- To infer that planting trees, plants the future
- To identify and understand the refrain in the poem
- To identify the rhyme scheme used
- To note the poetic devices used

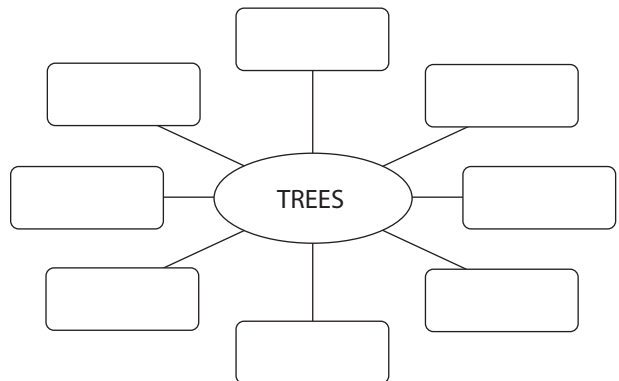
Summary: The poem 'The Heart of the Tree' extols the act of planting trees by pointing out how a tree helps life on earth and that it has a direct connection to a nation's growth. The poet lists out the benefits of planting a tree, and beautifully describes the actual essence of what a person does when he plants a tree. He aptly says that when somebody plants a tree, he plants not only a tree, but something that serves as a friend of the sun, sky, and breeze. He adds that stems are like beauty shafts and provide shelter to different types of birds. In a way, the poet feels that the person who plants a tree also plants a future. The next generation will definitely benefit the nation as well as the environment of the whole world.

Pre-reading

Draw this map on the board, and ask students to write down all the words they could think of when they hear the word *trees*:

Ask students:

What do you expect from a poem titled, 'The heart of the tree'?



READING

Students comprehend, analyse, make note of literary devices.

Play the audio track and let students listen to the poem. Pause after each stanza and discuss/conduct comprehension checks.

Stanza 1

Explanation: Trees make food from sunlight and air and in turn, provide food to other creatures and so, they are 'friends' of the sun and sky. These beautiful trees that sway in the breeze also cool the earth. In planting a tree, a person helps to provide homes in the treetops for nesting birds, which sing sweetly to their babies at sunrise and sunset. These songs are so melodious that they sound as if they are coming from heaven itself.

Why do you think the poet starts the poem with a question? (To develop curiosity in the reader) In this stanza, what does the poet say are the uses of planting trees? Why does the poet say that planting a tree is planting a friend of the sun and the sky?(Trees attain height due to the sun and the process of photosynthesis is carried out in the presence of sun that helps trees to grow. Trees also help in taking impure air and releasing pure air with oxygen in the sky.) 'The shaft of beauty towering high...' Describe the image that is build up in this line.

Why does the mother-croon of the bird sing in hushed tones? (It sings in a hushed voice because it is sung during twilight when human activities are restricted and an atmosphere of calmness prevails.) What time of the day is it? Why is twilight referred to as 'happy'? (The birds are happy to hear their mother's song in soft tones at the end of the day.)What is 'treble' and 'harmony'?

Explain to students the meaning of treble and harmony, as only students who have learnt classical western music will know the difference.

Note: A high tone in music is called treble. Harmony is the way in which different musical notes are played or sung together and combine to make a pleasant sound.

What is the reference made her? (The soft voice of the mother becomes one with the pleasant harmony of the universe.) Is 'The Heart of the Tree' an apt title for the poem? (Yes, just as the heart purifies the air and sends oxygen to all parts of the body to function well, so also the trees purifies the environment and all living things will lead a healthy life.)

Stanza 2

Explanation: As the years come and go, trees provide shade, rain, buds, fruits and seeds which in turn will become trees. These trees make the earth look grand and beautiful. As the number of trees increases, the place turns into a forest. These forests in turn provide life and nourishment for future generations thus providing them with happiness and contentment.

How do people benefit from trees? Discuss with your partner: How do trees contribute to the glory of the land? (Trees provide us with wood, fruits and medicines. The one who plants a tree plants the entire forest for the benefit of human beings.)By planting a tree, how does one provide for 'The harvest of a coming age'? What will "unborn eyes" see? Who are they? (The generations to come) Why do you think they will rejoice?(Trees planted today will provide for the coming days and the next generation will reap its benefits.)

Stanza 3

Explanation: The act of planting a tree reflects a person's loyalty to his home, and to the earth because it is done for the betterment of the future. Therefore, it is compared to showering one's good wishes on our fellow beings. Every single part of the tree—the leaves, sap and wood—is proof of these good thoughts and deeds. Therefore, every seed that will grow into a tree represents the progress and good of a nation. It is this idea that takes root in the heart of one who plants a tree.

Group discussion:

How do trees contribute to the wealth of a nation? (Trees, besides keeping our environment healthy and clean can also yield a number of products such as fruits, flowers

and other things that are good for health and are also economically beneficial.) *How is the person planting a tree a blessing to the nation?*

Group discussion: *Is a person planting a tree serving himself, his nation or the world? Give reasons. Is he a good citizen? How?*

(Allow students some time to discuss in groups. After the discussion, allow them to share with the entire class. Monitor the activity, and encourage varied answers, provided they are well supported.)

How can this poem help in making an individual a good citizen? (A person who plants trees brings happiness, blessings and prosperity. Human kind benefits from trees, so a person who plants a tree is really involved in a noble cause. His practice of planting trees reflects the humanistic idea of common good.) *What does, "...Stirs in his heart who plants a tree, mean?* (The poet talks about man's heart, his feelings, dreams and wishes behind planting a tree. This leads to the title 'The Heart of the Tree'.)

Pick the refrain in the poem. What effect does the refrain have on the reader? (The refrain in

the poem sets the tone for the entire poem. It is also a constant reminder to suggest continuity and show that the act of planting trees should be a continuous process.)

Poetic devices

Rhyme scheme: It is a nine-line stanza with the scheme ababbccaa. Though the language is simple, careful wordings make the poem more expressive and obviously musical and attractive.

Figure of speech: Alliteration in the last two lines of the poem. In last 2 lines we see the phrases 'Sea to Sea' and 'Stir' with the same consonant sound 'S' in the beginning.

Refrain: What does he plant who plants a tree?

Post-reading

Form three groups. Let each group recite one stanza.

Let all the students join in for the first line and the last line of every stanza.

Guide them to read in unison and with pronunciation, if required.

STUDENTS' BOOK ANSWER KEY

The Heart of a Tree

Comprehension

- A.**
1. The tree is compared to a flag.
 2. Since trees are so tall, they seem as if they can touch the sky and therefore, heaven itself. This home is for the birds that build nests in the tree-tops.
 3. Rain and shade can be planted by planting a tree. Since trees help in bringing rain and provide shade, the act of planting a tree is equal to planting rain and shade themselves.
 4. The speaker says that trees are the 'glory of the plain' because they make the plain very beautiful and glorious with their presence.
 5. By planting a tree, one showers blessings on the neighbourhood in the form of goodwill, kindness and generosity.
 6. Feelings of love, loyalty and goodwill for one's home and the earth itself arise in the heart of a person who plants a tree.

- B.** 1. a. The sweet song of a mother bird chirping to her babies can be heard in the twilight. It is so sweet that it can be described as one among the sweetest songs that are sung by angels in heaven itself.
b. The twilight is described as 'happy' because it is full of cheer from the sweet birdsong.
Suggested answer. Accept any logical answer.
2. a. 'Heritage' refers to something that belongs to a particular community that exists from the past and continues to be important. Here, 'the forest's heritage' refers to those trees that were first planted and which then contributed to the subsequent growth of the forest.
b. A single tree, if allowed to grow and flourish, will in turn give seeds and saplings that will lead to the growth of other trees. The benefits in the form of food, water, clean air and shelter are the harvests that will be available to people even in the future, who are not yet born. Thus, a tree which is the product of the forest that existed will in turn provide benefits to future generations, and thus serve as a link between the heritage of the forest and the harvest of the coming age.
Suggested answer. Accept any logical answer.
3. a. This line refers to any person that holds seeds in his hand to plant a tree.
b. A single seed, if allowed to grow into a tree, can in turn lead to the growth of so many other trees, which will provide benefits for individuals and also contribute to the progress of the land by providing food, shelter, wood, clean air, rainfall and protection from disasters apart from so many other things.
Suggested answer. Accept any logical answer.

- C.** 1. *Free response*
2. Yes, this poem is especially important in today's times. For many years, humans have been destroying trees and the environment and this has put the planet in great danger. This poem is thus a reminder of the importance of trees.
Suggested answer. Accept any logical answer.
3. The poem is called *The Heart of a Tree* because it describes all the gifts that trees give us without any expectation of anything. In doing so, it makes us realise that if a tree had a heart, it would be one that is very generous, loving and giving. Therefore, we get the idea that we too should make our own hearts like that of a tree.
Suggested answer. Accept any logical answer.

Appreciating the Poem

1. a. By asking a question and providing an immediate answer the poet wants us to realise the numerous benefits we get from trees and how important they are to us. In providing an immediate response to the question, the poet makes us realise that the answers to this question are readily available, which tells us just how useful trees are.
Suggested answer. Accept any logical answer.
- b. In repeating these lines, the poet restates the benefits and importance of trees so that we do not forget them, and consequently learn to look after and respect nature and the environment.

2. 1. a friend of sun and sky – Here, the tree is compared to a friend because of the benefits it provides in the form of clean air and shade.

the flag of breezes free – The tree is compared to a flag as it sways in the breeze.

shaft of beauty, towering high – The tree is compared to a beautiful pillar or a column that is so tall that it appears to touch the sky.

a home to heaven – Birds nest in the tree and make their home there. The nests, being high up in the branches, appear as if they are in heaven.

The treble of heaven's harmony – The birdsong is compared to a song from heaven because it is so sweet.

cool shade and tender rain, And seed and bud of days to be – Since the tree provides us with shade and rain, seeds and buds, the poet equates trees with these things.

the glory of the plain – The poet imagines a scene where tall majestic trees grow on a plain and suggests that these trees are the most beautiful thing on the plain and hence calls them the 'glory' of the plain. Therefore, in planting trees, one is thus doing something that adds to the glory of the plain.

the forest's heritage – Here, the word 'heritage' denotes all the trees that have grown over several years to make the forest and therefore, they become all the more important to the forest and region.

His blessings on the neighborhood – As a result of all that we get from the tree, in planting a tree, a person is in fact showering his blessings and goodwill onto the neighbourhood.

all the growth of all our land – the seed that a person plants that will become a tree stands for the 'growth' of the land

Suggested answers. Accept any logical answers.

Vocabulary

1. harmony 2. tender 3. glory 4. heritage 5. hollow

QUESTION BANK

The Heart of the Tree

A. Answer in brief.

1. Why do you think the speaker starts the poem with a question? What does the repetition of the question throughout the poem indicate?

Ans: The speaker starts the poem with a question to develop curiosity in the reader. The same question recurs throughout the poem to suggest continuity and show that the act of planting trees should be a continuous process.

2. Why is twilight referred to as 'happy'?

Ans: The birds are happy to hear their mother's song in soft tones at the end of the day.

B. Answer in detail.

*He plants the forest's heritage;
The harvest of a coming age;
The joy that unborn eyes shall see—
These things he plants who plants a tree.*

What do the lines, *The harvest of a coming age* mean?

Ans: The planting of a tree is like planting "the glory of the plain." By doing this seemingly simple and fairly common act, one is actually participating in developing the heritage of the forest. They make themselves an integral part of the future. The speaker encourages people to consider the tree as being a vehicle to immortality which brings joy to the world yet to be born.

C. Choose the correct answer.

What does the speaker convey through this poem?

- The speaker describes the beauty of trees throughout the world.
- The speaker emphasizes how beneficial trees are to the present and future generations.
- The speaker professes that the duty of every citizen is to plant a tree.

Ans: b

D. Read the lines and answer the questions.

*He plants a home to heaven anigh;
For song and mother-croon of bird
In hushed and happy twilight heard—
The treble of heaven's harmony—*

- According to these lines, what does a person who plants a tree actually do?
- What do the lines mean?
- He plants a home to heaven anigh*, What do the words *heaven anigh*, *heaven's harmony*, convey?

Ans: a. Whoever plants a tree provides shelter for the birds, whose sweet crooning in the silent and happy twilights brings delight to us. He ensures peace, comfort, beauty, music, and harmony for himself and others.

b. The presence of green trees is nothing short of Heaven and by planting a tree, a person makes us feel as though we are close to heaven.

c. The use of words such as *heaven anigh*, and *heaven's harmony*, is intended to convey the impression that the work of planting a tree is indeed a heavenly and glorious deed.

E. Answer in brief. (Think and answer)

What does the speaker mean by the following lines?

*A nation's growth from sea to sea
Stirs in his heart who plants a tree.*

Ans: The speaker feels that, in a way, the person who plants a tree also plants a future. The next generation will definitely benefit the nation as well as the environment of the whole world.